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ABSTRACT

Issues in ensuring educational quality are examined in this document. Section 1 provides information for developing plans and targets. The following areas are highlighted: school-effectiveness research findings; developments in Scotland to improved educational quality; internal and external evaluation of schools; evaluation criteria; the role of the school development plan; and strategies for school self-evaluation. The second section examines performance indicators, with a focus on the role, characteristics, and types of performance indicators; agencies and organizations involved in developing performance indicators; the indicators produced by Her Majesty's Inspectors; the critical performance indicators; and using performance indicators to best effect. (Contains 16 references.) (LMI)

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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Quality Assurance in Education:

Plans, Targets and Performance Indicators

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Current Issues

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HM Inspectors of Schools

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this document arose out of comments offered by Headteachers and others in the course of discussions at a number of Audit Unit meetings. It was suggested to us that we should pull together, in one document, the issues covered in the keynote talks and discussion groups.

This we have done. We hope that the document will be of use in school development planning, in-service training and as a reference source for meetings and seminars on quality assurance. We feel that the paper provides a useful complement to the report on "Quality Assurance in Education: Current Debates".*

HM Inspectors of Schools, Audit Unit
May 1993

* Edited by Ian Stronach and published by University of Stirling, 1993

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SECTION 1

1.0 DO SCHOOLS MAKE A DIFFERENCE ?

1.1 The overwhelming message of HMI and research findings is that schools do indeed make a significant difference to the attainment of their pupils.

1.2 This apparently common-sense conclusion had been questioned in the mid-1970s. Research at that time argued that because parental background and other social factors were the most important in determining attainment, the contribution of schools could be regarded as relatively small and unimportant.

1.3 It is now recognised that individual schools differ widely in terms of the progress made by children with similar backgrounds. Thus, according to **Mortimore**:

> In general, the studies indicate that - even when differences in intake have been taken into account - some schools are more likely than others to lead to good outcomes.

1.4 This is an encouraging message for all involved in education. It stresses that schools can have a significant effect even where there is considerable disadvantage and deprivation, for as pointed out by **Reynolds:**

> Whatever the precise size of school effects, and contemporary research is suggesting that they are of large size, it is important to note that the school environment is a modifiable or alterable influence on young people, unlike their community, family background or the wider systems of inequality and social stratification that affect them. Schools can do little to change these wider influences upon young people's development but it is clear that they can have substantial positive effects upon young people's development if they can become more effective.

1.5 The possible magnitude of school effects was illustrated in a Scottish study by **Willms and Cuttance**. After controlling for family background characteristics and pupil ability prior to entering secondary school, they found:

> The extent of the variation between the most and the least effective schools is suggested by the finding that in the most effective schools the average pupil left with five or more "O' Grade passes (A-C) whilst in the worst schools a similar pupil left with only one or two 'O' Grade passes.

1.6 Researchers have identified a number of different sets of features linked to school effectiveness and these sets have much in common with each other. **Hopkins** identifies two issues in particular on which the school effectiveness literature is in agreement:

> First, that differences in outcomes are systematically related to variations in the school's climate, culture, or ethos. Second, that the school's culture is amenable to alteration by concerted action on the part of the school staff.

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1.7 Two of the most important features in the culture of an effective school are the presence of high expectations and supportive relationships, as summed up by **Hargreaves:**

> **Effective schools are demanding places, where teachers expect and ensure high standards of work and behaviour; at the same time, they are responsive to pupils, for the teachers are approachable and, since they value pupils, seek to involve them in the life and work of the school. It is this combination of pressure and support which characterises the effective school.**

2.0 WHY THE CONCERN WITH ISSUES OF QUALITY IN EDUCATION ?

2.1 There is universal recognition of the right of all pupils in our schools to receive a high quality education.

2.2 The quality and effectiveness of the education system critically affects the economic well-being of the nation.

2.3 There needs to be continual improvement in the standards of provision and attainment because pupils have to be equipped to contribute to, and participate fully in, an increasingly complex and changing society.

2.4 Our future in the wider Europe and the World community depends on us being able to develop and use effectively the human resources available to us.

2.5 Very large sums are expended on education. It is necessary to ensure that there is a good return for this and that schools provide value for money.

3.0 WHAT ARE WE DOING TO FURTHER IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION ?

3.1 National developments in recent years have focused on building a framework within which high quality education can be provided. They have pointed towards a quality culture:

* to promote improvement as the central thrust of schools' planning;
* to improve institutional approaches to achieving what has been described as systemic quality, that is, quality that pervades the institution, as distinct from but embracing, and more powerful than, individual quality.

Within the overall strategy, there have been a number of related developments on, for example:

the curriculum

3.2 The 5-14 programme is a major curricular initiative clarifying learning outcomes, providing a structure for continuity, coherence and progression, and promoting a range of approaches to learning. The associated programme of national testing focuses attention on levels of attainment.

3.3 The Standard Grade programme has resulted in increased numbers of pupils gaining qualifications. It has also promoted a wider range of approaches to teaching and

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learning including, for example, the planned development of practical and problem solving skills.

3.4 The 16-18 Action Plan greatly extended the range of appropriate courses in the upper stages of the secondary school.

3.5 Following the Howie Report consultation period, further developments relating to the upper stages of secondary education are currently under consideration.

the quality of teaching

3.6 Planned activity and in-service training facilitates effective staff development relevant to local or national priorities.

3.7 Certain training courses receive national support and resourcing.

3.8 The present introduction of a national scheme of staff development and appraisal provides the basis for ensuring that the teaching force can improve their skills and acquire necessary new ones, while balancing the claims of individual career development with the needs of the school.

3.9 Revised guidelines for teacher training courses set out the range of competences that a new teacher is expected to possess at the beginning of his or her career.

3.10 There is a growing focus on the support given to probationer teachers.

3.11 A series of HMI reports is in process of publication giving advice to teachers on effective teaching and learning in a range of secondary school subjects and on other aspects such as provision for children with special educational needs. Earlier HMI reports on effective secondary schools and effective primary schools gave more general advice on teaching and learning strategies.

resources

3.12 Developments in educational technology increasingly enhance the educational process. Learning is facilitated through the effective and efficient use of new media, methods and materials. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and the national resourcing of developments such as Standard Grade are key promoters of this.

parental involvement

3.13 The introduction of School Boards has fostered the development of positive contacts between schools and parents and heightened awareness of all around in the education offered.

training of headteachers

3.14 The significant increase in management training for headteachers promotes improvements in their leadership qualities, professional competence and capacity to develop effective working relationships.

3.15 All of the developments described above are intended to bring about changes in what happens in classrooms to the benefit of pupils. The developments have been promoted through complementary initiatives in a number of education authorities, often focused on valuable pilot work in particular schools. Several education authorities have begun to set out their aims in frameworks which provide a context for development work across all aspects of educational provision.

4.0 HOW DO WE EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION ?

4.1 There must be means of judging whether a quality education is actually being delivered; quality must be assured. One way of judging quality is to examine the **outcomes** of the educational process in the school.

4.2 Academic attainment provides one outcome measure but the attitudes which young people acquire and the way in which they develop as balanced and rounded citizens are no less important.

4.3 Judgements on quality should also be made in terms of the **processes** and conditions within the school: whether what the content of what is taught and the learning environment created by the school promote desirable outcomes.

4.4 In education, outcomes are the product of processes occurring over a period of years but information is required on an ongoing basis. **Judgements about overall quality should be based on a balanced consideration of both processes and outcomes.**

5.0 INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF SCHOOLS ?

5.1 There has always been recognition that it is important to know how well schools are performing, and a wide-ranging literature on the **effectiveness** of schools produced over the last 20 or so years has established a consensus about common features of effective schools.

5.2 In recent years, the focus of this literature has begun to shift from setting out such characteristics towards looking at how a school can develop and bring about **improvement** in ways that enable it to be more effective in achieving its educational goals.

5.3 This concern for school improvement has been highlighted by the emphasis within ***The Parents' Charter in Scotland*** on standards and quality in education.

5.4 While research evidence indicates broad agreement on the characteristics of effective schools it may be less clear what action a school should take to establish these characteristics. The first step on the road to improvement is for a school to gain a clear understanding of its current stage of development.

5.5 Evaluation of education in a school might be undertaken internally by the staff of the school. **Those who engage in self-evaluation start from a position of strength in that they are informed insiders with a close and detailed knowledge of the inner workings of their organisation. As personal stakeholders they should readily accept and act upon their findings**. The process of being consulted, having one's opinions considered, feeling that one's contributions are seriously valued and that they may result in change for the better are all powerful builders of morale, confidence and commitment.

5.6 As **Turner and Clift** point out:

> "the most effective means of improving the quality of the education provided by schools is to give them responsibility for reviewing their own performance and carrying out any reforms which seem necessary in consequence."

5.7 Alternatively or additionally, evaluation of the education provided by a school can be undertaken by the responsible authority. External prompting, guidance and support can be important in assisting a school to make judgements on the quality of the education provided. Indeed in the absence of such factors a school's own evaluation might simply reinforce its existing impression of its situation or avoid the consideration of difficult areas.

5.8 The Parents' Charter restates the case for independent inspection of schools' performance. A system of independent national inspection addresses national concerns for standards and quality in education through HMI evaluation and reporting on the strengths and weaknesses of provision.

5.9 Following a revision of HMI inspection procedures, an inspection is a more focused agent of change than in the past. Schools and the authority have to produce a paper setting out how they plan to address the recommendations in the report and there is a further inspection about one year later to assess and confirm progress.

6.0 WHAT SHOULD BE THE REFERENCE POINT FOR INTERNAL EVALUATION ?

6.1 The starting point is a recognition on the part of all concerned that they must be aware of the quality of what they do and the need for improvement.

6.2 And building on that, schools need a structure, the parts of which are:

* clear set of aims, targets and standards to be achieved;
* mechanisms for delivering them, some of which may exist, other of which may require development; and
* ways of assessing performance against expectation/aspiration and communicating the result.

7.0 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN ?

7.1 A **school development plan** is a way of organising relevant information about a school's current position and its intentions for the future. The consultation paper "School Development Plans in Scotland" issued by SOED is a good reference point. The plan provides the means of:

* articulating and publicising the school's aims and aspirations, and the specific targets to be addressed in the short and long term;
* expressing priorities for development and when these will be achieved;
* offering evaluation (audit) of performance against the first two.

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What are the strengths of school development planning ?

7.2 There are three main functions of development plans:

* managing change;
* sharing of responsibility; and
* rendering account.

7.3 The critical function of the school development plan is to help bring about effective action to assure and improve the quality of education provided by the school.

7.4 The process of development planning enables the school to focus effort on a manageable number of agreed priority targets and to judge the degree of success in overtaking them.

7.5 It also encourages the school to maintain commitment to areas which are of continuing relevance. Within this structure, school audit is used to identify appropriate priority targets.

7.6 A school development plan provides a focus for the school and the education authority to share in the responsibility for assuring the quality of education.

8.0 HOW DOES A SCHOOL EVALUATE (AUDIT) ITS PERFORMANCE ?

8.1 Undertaking a school audit involves school managers first of all in making decisions about the aspects of the life and work of the school which are to be audited and how they are to judge the quality of the school in each aspect.

8.2 Education is a complex process. It can be difficult to make precise judgements about what constitutes good quality in any aspect. Further, the various aspects of the educational process interact with one another. All of this means that school audit has to be structured carefully.

8.3 The current focus is on the school because it comprises an administrative unit which can be evaluated. However there are variations within schools and within stages or departments.. The HMI Audit Unit report Standards *and Quality in Scottish Education 1991-92* shows that there are **aspects** of every school where improvement is possible. For example, in some schools, the quality of learning and teaching within the classroom can be improved. In others better planning at a primary stage or secondary department may be needed.

8.4 Responsibility for quality assurance rests at each of these levels. The school will not be able to respond to ever-changing demands unless all engaged in its work play their full part in assuring quality.

8.5 HMI's recommended framework of key areas for audit in Scottish schools is:

Primary School Class/Stage	Whole School
i. Quality of the curriculum ii. Quality of learning and teaching iii. Pupil progress and attainment	Management of - i. Staff ii. Curriculum planning iii. Available finance and resources iv. Accommodation v. Ethos (including relationships with pupils, parents and teachers, and discipline and counselling)
Secondary School Department	Whole School
i. Quality of courses ii. Quality of learning and teaching iii. Pupil progress and attainment iv. Management of - * Staff * Curriculum planning * Accommodation and resources * Ethos	Management of - i. Staff ii. Curriculum planning iii. Available finance and resources iv. Accommodation v. Guidance vi. Ethos (including relationships with pupils, parents and teachers, and discipline)

8.6 Audit within any one of these key areas involves consideration of a wide range of factors. Accordingly the frameworks have to be developed further in a way that is systematic, manageable and illuminating. HMI recommend that this development should be based on the use of **performance indicators.** These are discussed in detail in the second part of this paper. Performance indicators provide the means for structuring the audit, for selection of areas for focus within it and for facilitating judgements about the performance of the school. The next section asks: "Why Performance Indicators?".

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SECTION 2

9.0 WHAT SHOULD PERFORMANCE INDICATORS DO ?

9.1 Education performance indicators allow evaluative statements to be made about aspects of education which are large enough to avoid fragmentation but small enough to be observed, considered and evaluated separately.

9.2 In looking at the performance of the education system a method is needed to define aims, determine the extent to which these aims are being realised and draw sensible conclusions about the next steps which should be taken. In particular, teachers and headteachers must start by achieving common understanding in the school of what is to be attempted and what would constitute success.

9.3 Such an understanding may be approached through defining performance indicators which:

* identify key aspects of the school's activities;
* set out criteria which assist judgements to be made about quality ;
* point to areas which require detailed and specific investigation ("signposts");
* provide a basis for measuring the performance of the school against a set of defined criteria ("touchstones"); and
* enable school managers to make useful decisions about strengths and weaknesses.

10.0 WHAT FORMS DO PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TAKE ?

Indicators are frequently divided for ease of reference into two broad categories:

10.1 **Quantitative** indicators relate to variables which can readily be expressed in numerical form. Some examples are:

* % of S5 pupils who gain at least 3 H Grade passes at band C or better
* % attendance of P7 pupils
* average cost per pupil
* pupil-teacher ratio
* proportion of S4 pupils placed on work experience
* proportion of parents who attend on consultation evenings

10.2 **Qualitative** indicators relate to other aspects in which performance can vary but the variables cannot easily be expressed in numerical form; they must be observed, described and evaluated. Examples include:

* quality of pupils' learning
* quality of the teaching process
* teacher-pupil relationships
* meeting pupils' needs
* partnership with School Board

10.3 Alternative categorisations of indicators are possible. For example, **input** indicators relate to the resources devoted to education, **output** indicators to processes and conditions established within the education system and **outcome** indicators to their effects in educational terms.

11.0 WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD PERFORMANCE INDICATORS HAVE ?

11.1 Analysis of the research literature and reviews on performance indicators for education suggests that they should have the following characteristics:

* **Significance:** They should measure things that are valued as important and can be changed by the actions of teachers and school managers.

* **Validity:** They should be widely accepted and understood and measure what they are supposed to measure in an accurate way.

* **Feasibility:** It should be possible to collect necessary information and apply the indicators within the time, resources and expertise available and without undue intrusion on the work of the school.

* **Comparability:** Indicators should measure things which persist over time and have the same meaning in different contexts, enabling comparisons to be made over time, indicating trends, and across schools and regions.

* **Clarity**: The relationship between the indicator and the information used to derive it should be straightforward and understandable. Indicators should be described in ways that make possible to link them with other indicators for purposes of analysis, explanation and prediction.

* **Objectivity:** It should be possible for different users of the indicator to arrive at consistent judgements.

12.0 WHO IS DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS ?

12.1 Much attention has been given world-wide to the identification of performance indicators which would help educational policy-makers and managers to come to decisions and various approaches have been proposed but all concerned agree that indicators should not be a random collection of statistics or individual components.

12.2 HMI in Scotland has produced and published sets of performance indicators for use in primary and secondary schools and in further education. Future publications will extend this to the early stages of education and to provision for pupils with special educational needs. Development of performance indicators is also well advanced in further education where performance indicators are considered in the HMI reports *Measuring Up* and *On Target.* A staff development package on Performance Indicators in community education is in preparation.

12.3 There have also been initiatives in the development of performance indicators by several education authorities which have tailored the HMI indicators to their own needs or have produced alternative sets. Cross-referencing, where required, can help schools avoid confusion.

12.4 SOED is playing a leading role in one aspect of the work of an international project co-ordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which is developing indicators across a range of aspects of education.

12.5 The availability of data on many quantitative indicators has resulted in their being the focus of most of the international developments to date. Thus, for example, the indicators in *Education at a Glance, (1992)* the first report of the OECD project, deal particularly with the demography, costs, resources and outcomes of education in OECD countries. OECD work is continuing on other areas such as attitudes and expectations (the area co-ordinated by SOED), but the qualitative basis for such indicators makes it more difficult to establish common criteria.

13.0 WHAT SORT OF INDICATORS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED BY HMI ?

13.1 HMI has designed sets of performance indicators in the light of the above criteria, within the framework of key areas identified for school audit as outlined in the first section of this paper.

13.2 These performance indicators have been based on the experience of evaluating the work of schools. Most are qualitative indicators of processes, conditions and standards of attainment within the school but quantitative indicators have been developed for examination results in secondary schools.

13.3 In each of the key areas a number of contributory aspects of the work has been identified and a performance indicator developed for each.

13.4 HMI performance indicators are structured firstly by specifying for each a number of themes to assist teachers in understanding exactly what to be taken into account.

13.5 Secondly, for each indicator four levels of performance are identified, the first and third of which of which are illustrated by factors which characterise them in terms of each of the themes of the indicator.

13.6 The four levels of performance are:

*	Major strengths -	*a very good performance (summarised as very good)*
*	Strengths outweigh any weaknesses -	*some improvement desirable (good)*
*	Strengths outweighed by weaknesses -	*improvement needed in certain aspects (fair)*
*	Major weaknesses -	*an unsatisfactory performance (unsatisfactory)*

13.7 The illustrations are based on observation of the work of schools. They are intended to relate to the implementation of principles rather than to very specific "sine qua non" criteria. Accordingly they are not intended to be comprehensive or exclusive and they also serve as models for schools which might wish to develop indicators for their own particular priorities. The aim of publication is to assist schools in their own work rather than provide a prescriptive approach to educational audit.

13.8 As stated above, HMI performance indicators are mainly qualitative indicators. However, following the use of them in making evaluations, it is possible to derive quantitative data on, for example, the proportion of cases in which performance in a particular aspect is unsatisfactory. This is the approach adopted in *Standards and Quality in Scottish Schools 1991/92*.

13.9 The HMI system of indicators was piloted in school inspections and developed with the co-operation of a group of education authorities. These indicators form the basis for all HMI inspections and for Audit Unit reports such as *Standards and Quality in Scottish Education, 1991/92*. Communication between schools and authorities is likely to be assisted by a shared understanding of the factors involved and the specification of levels of performance; a common language is likely to minimise misunderstandings.

14.0 WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS ?

14.1 The indicators that are used should include quantitative indicators, qualitative indicators based on professional consideration and also indicators based on judgements which take account of the views of parents and pupils. Indicators in the last category, *Ethos Indicators*, deal with aspects which are central to the well-being of a school.

14.2 Within the HMI set of indicators, each one relates to a vital part of the life and work of every school and it is important that a school audit should take account of all of them.

14.3 However, it is possible to identify some of these areas where performance indicators will be particularly crucial to consideration of the quality of education provided, including:

* quality of learning and teaching
* pupil progress and attainment
* quality of courses *(individual courses and the curriculum)*
* quality of ethos *(including views of parents, pupils and teachers)*
* quality of management *(e.g. staff, finance)*
* levels of attendance and truancy
* unit costs
* leavers' destinations

15.0 USING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO BEST EFFECT ?

15.1 No single indicator should be used in isolation to make firm judgements; a question raised by one may be confirmed or refuted by another. An individual indicator will not lead to an answer but to the right kind of question.

15.2 A small number of performance indicators is unlikely to give an adequate picture of the work of a school. The use of any indicator, or group of indicators, should be set in the broad context of the other work of the school.

15.3 It would be wrong in any case to focus too narrowly within a school on certain aspects of its work to the detriment of the breadth of education which it offers.

15.4 The impetus for accountability, quality, and value for money in education points to the need for the use of performance indicators as an integral part of the evaluation of educational provision through school audit.

15.5 But there should be an expectation that when the indicators are applied over a period of time they will provide evidence of improvement.

15.6 This will not happen merely because indicators exist, are accepted and are used. A school must **plan** for improvement, using the performance indicators within school **audit** to identify **targets** which can be overtaken to bring about the desired improvements in the quality of education provided.

16.0 FURTHER READING

The Parents' Charter in Scotland (September 1991)
(Published by the Scottish Office)

School Development Plans in Scotland: A Consultation Paper (SOED, April 1993)

Standards and Quality in Scottish Education 1991-92 (November 1992)
(A report by the Audit Unit, HM Inspectors of Schools)

"School Effectiveness Research: Its Messages for School Improvement". (1991), edited by Sheila Riddell and Sally Brown and published by Management of Educational Resources Unit, HM Inspectors of Schools.
The quotations in section 1 have all been taken from this publication:

Mortimore: page 13
Reynolds: page 22
Willms and Cuttance: page 3
Hopkins: page 57
Hargreaves: page 68

Quality Assurance in Education: Current Debates, edited by Ian Stronach and published by University of Stirling, Education Department, 1993

Education at a Glance (1992), (OECD)

Educational Audit, Performance Indicators and School Improvement
Ernie Spencer and Isobel McGregor, HMI, SOED.
Scottish Educational Review, Vol 24 (2), November 1992, pp 118-124

Measuring Up: Performance Indicators in Further Education (1990)
(A report by HM Inspectors of Schools)

On Target (1993), (a report by HM Inspectors of Schools)

Materials provided in recent years to support development planning in schools:

The Role of School Development Plans in Managing School Effectiveness: Management of Educational Resources 5 (1991)
(A report by HM Inspectors of Schools)

Staff Development Packages published by HMI, SOED:

Using Examination Results in School Self-evaluation: Relative Ratings and National Comparison Factors (August 1991)

Using Performance Indicators in Secondary School Self-evaluation (March 1992)

Using Performance Indicators in Primary School Self-evaluation (May 1992)

Using Ethos Indicators in Secondary School Self-evaluation:
Taking Account of the Views of Pupils, Parents, and Teachers (May 1992)

Using Ethos Indicators in Secondary School Self-evaluation:
Taking Account of the Views of Pupils, Parents, and Teachers (May 1992)

Taking Account: The views of Pupils, Parents and Teachers (March 1993)
(Videos for use in school self-evaluation, produced by QIE Centre, Jordanhill College for Audit Unit, HM Inspectors of Schools)

The Audit Unit was established in April 1992 as a result of The Parents' Charter in Scotland (1991). Recent publications from the Unit include:

- Examination Results in Scottish Secondary Schools, 1990-92
- Standards and Quality in Scottish Schools 1991-1992
- The Role of School Development Plans: Headteachers' Views
  (Commissioned from The MVA Consultancy)
- Quality Assurance in Education: Current Debates
  (Commissioned from University of Stirling)
- Taking Account: Videos on Ethos Indicators
  (Commissioned from The Quality in Education Centre, University of Strathclyde)

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